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SUBJECT: CPV EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMISSION CHAIRMAN: HANOI'S
INTERACTONS WITH PYONGYANG HAVE DROPPED OFF

Ref: HANOI 535

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On September 30, CPV External Relations Commission (ERC) Chairman Tran Van Hang told the Ambassador that the Party is pleased with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's late June visit to the United States because of the substantive agreements reached. On the DPRK, the Chairman relayed that Hanoi is disappointed with recent setbacks in the six party process and has no credible information on Kim Jong Il's health; interactions between Hanoi and Pyongyang have dropped off over the last two months. Hang also previewed the upcoming Party and National Assembly sessions, which will examine Vietnam's socioeconomic situation. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Meeting with the Ambassador on September 30, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) External Relations Commission (ERC) Chairman Tran Van Hang said the Party and Vietnamese people have "very positive" views of Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's late June visit to the United States. The visit, he relayed, was the most substantive of recent high-level exchanges. The economic, commercial, educational, environmental and political-military agreements flowing from the PM's visit show that U.S.-Vietnam relations are on the right track, Hang declared. Deputy Secretary Negroponte's September 10-14 visit here helped propel the bilateral relationship forward even more, the Chairman and Ambassador agreed.

¶3. (SBU) Turning to the DPRK, Hang said Hanoi is disappointed with recent setbacks in six party efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. Hanoi hopes the parties will re-engage soon as dialogue is the only way to peace, he said. The DPRK is a closed society and Hanoi has not heard much lately about what is going on inside that country, he said. The ERC has no solid information on Dear Leader Kim Jong Il's health condition, he added. Hang said he found the Dear Leader to be "quite friendly" when he met him last year as part of the CPV General Secretary's delegation that went to Pyongyang.

¶4. (SBU) In addition to high-level exchanges, Hanoi has sought to promote commercial ties with Pyongyang and people-to-people interactions, although concrete agreements have proven elusive, Hang continued. Over the last two months, interactions between the two sides have, for unknown reasons, dropped off, he said. Hang normally sees a DPRK Embassy representative in Hanoi on a regular basis, but lately these meetings have not taken place, he said. The Ambassador responded that the USG appreciates Hanoi's efforts to bring the DPRK out of its shell.

¶5. (SBU) Hang said Vietnam's top leaders are preparing for the next Party plenum, slated to commence on October 2, and National Assembly (NA) session, which will begin on October 16. (Note: Like many CPV leaders, Hang is a Central Committee (CC) member and National Assembly deputy. End note). At the plenum, the 160 members of the CPV CC will review the socioeconomic situation since the current leadership took charge in mid-2006, he relayed. Discussion topics will include Vietnam's high inflation and slower than expected economic growth in 2008, he said. Economic growth is expected to be about 6 to 6.5 percent this year, but the NA set a target of 8.5 percent, he explained. At the plenum, the CC will set the direction for the second half of the current leadership's tenure, he said; the next Party Congress is slated to take place in 2011.

Comment: More Expansive Second Time

16. (SBU) Chairman Hang seemed more at ease discussing Vietnam's foreign relations compared to the first time the Ambassador met him (Reftel). Some local commentators say he is a rising star, although it is unclear who his patron is within the Party. As head of an important CPV commission, a CC member and NA deputy, he is well placed to offer insights on Party thinking on Vietnam's foreign relations.

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